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ABSTRACT

This booklet presents an overview of the Flexible Learning System, which consists of a set of activity based units for trainers interested in a process-oriented personalized approach to both staff development and early childhood education. The following available units are briefly described: (1) Analyzing Children's Books from a Chicano Perspective; (2) Arranging the Classroom for Children; (3) Communicating and Working with Parents; (4) Developing Children's Sense Perception; (5) Enriching Literature Experiences of Children; (6) Exploring Children's Thinking; (7) The Growing Mind: A Piagetian View of Young Children (four videotapes); (8) Helping Children Develop Healthy Self-Concepts; (9) An Introduction to Early Childhood Education; (10) Managing the Preschool Classroom; (11) Problem Solving with Children; (12) Selecting Children's Books with a Black Perspective; (13) Teaching Children to Integrate Language Experiences; (14) Understanding Children's Play Through Observation; (15) Using Toys and Games with Children; and (16) Working with Children's Concepts. (MS)

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an overview of the flexible learning system



SYSTEM—COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING UNITS FOR ADULTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



Inquiries may be addressed to:

**Dr. Masako Tanaka
Flexible Learning System
Far West Laboratory
1855 Folsom Street
San Francisco, California 94103
(415) 565-3162**

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an overview of the flexible learning system

The Flexible Learning System (FLS) is a Far West Laboratory product for the practitioner. Developed with funds from the National Institute of Education and the Office of Child Development, the Flexible Learning System provides print and audio-visual materials to help early childhood education personnel develop teaching skills in a variety of areas.

The Flexible Learning System had its origins in Far West Laboratory's Early Childhood Responsive Education Program developed by Dr. Glen Nimnicht. Nine years of experience in developing and implementing Head Start, Follow Through, and parent-education Responsive Education Programs provided a strong foundation for the development of Flexible Learning System topics and training processes. During the past three years, the Flexible Learning System staff under the direction of Dr. Masako Tanaka drew from these and other experiences and designed a set of activity-based materials for trainers interested in a process-oriented, personalized approach to both staff development and early childhood education.

An array of learning activities and media create a training process in which learners encounter ideas and skills through active exploration. The Flexible Learning System materials have become more than merely books. Reading alone will not yield the rich knowledge embedded in each of these units. Their full potential can be achieved only as a result of learner activity. The FLS units, properly used, can promote skills and insights richer than those conveyed by words alone.

FLS is oriented towards practices that can create intellectually, socially, and personally optimum environments for learning. The focus is on classroom process rather than prescribed curriculum. Topics addressed, include: self-concept, problem solving, educational values and models,

social interaction among and between children and adults, cultural pluralism, language integration, and conceptual development.

The Flexible Learning System consists of an initiating set of 15 units that can be integrated into a variety of staff development programs. While each of the FLS modules is an integral whole covering 10-12 weeks of work and designed to convey specific knowledge, skilled trainers will find the FLS a rich resource for exploring a range of subjects much broader than the product list suggests. Activities from a number of modules can be re-combined to create new topics, or treated independently as specific elements of given topics. Positive results from continuous field-based evaluation suggests that this set of units can initiate and sustain the varied uses put to it by trainers and teachers.

The FLS units are currently being distributed by the Far West Laboratory (see Price List). They are also available through the ERIC Clearinghouse for Early Childhood Education, College of Education, University of Illinois, 805 West Pennsylvania Avenue, Urbana, Illinois, 61801.



analyzing children's books from a Chicano perspective

*Oscar Uribe, Jr. and
Joseph S. Martinez*

This unit helps teachers to analyze, evaluate, and select books and other materials for use in classrooms for young children of Mexican-American heritage. Some teachers have used it as a general guide for analyzing materials for their representation of Chicano history and culture.

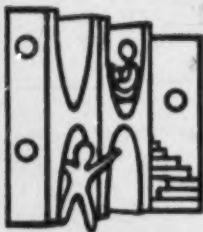
The introductory material explores the impact of children's books on self-concept and children's attitudes toward other ethnic groups. Evidence is presented concerning the value of multi-ethnic books in changing attitudes toward minority people.

Evaluation criteria are presented in two sections. In section one, learners explore guidelines for detecting culturally biased content. The issues of overgeneralization, evaluative and demeaning statements, and ethnic stereotypes provide a framework for analyzing and evaluating written text as well as illustrations. Section two explores the importance of understanding the history, culture, and language of the Chicano. The issues focus on recognizing culturally accurate information, language appropriateness, accurate source and treatment of material, and factual errors.

Each section contains examples of pictures, illustrations and text taken from books often recommended for use with the Chicano child. The learner can compare his/her application of the guidelines with the authors' evaluations. The unit concludes with self-assessment activities in which learners rewrite sample paragraphs after examining them for distortions specified in the guidelines.

A variety of reference bibliographies provide additional information and examples for further evaluation and topic exploration.

Related FLS topics: *Selecting Children's Books with a Black Perspective; Enriching Literature Experiences of Children; and Helping Children Develop Healthy Self-Concepts.*



arranging the classroom for children

Keith Alward

This unit is designed to help early childhood educators achieve an optimal classroom arrangement for a variety of activities and child groupings. It addresses basic principles of interaction between space, materials, classroom activities, and educational goals. It is particularly suited to educators interested in providing an open-education setting where children assume responsibility for their own activities. It can be useful for teachers of older children as well.

Part I introduces six basic classroom areas described by 12 variables covering size, boundaries, materials, working surfaces, and functions. Exploration of the relationship of variables to classroom operations leads learners to the solution of management problems through classroom arrangement and modification of the six basic areas to suit individual needs.

Part II provides an illustrated and descriptive guide to physical facilities and resources. Topics covered are: storage, working surfaces and seating, the floor, raised work and play platforms, enclosed areas, room and area dividers. References include over 60 publications, films, and additional resource addresses.

This book can be used individually or with fellow learners. Chapters contain a topic introduction, learner-activities, and a follow-up discussion. Learner-activities include classroom observations, simulation, and decision-making problems. Ripout activity forms are provided for recording activity results.

The chapters are integrated to help learners: recognize, describe, and evaluate six fundamental types of classroom areas; know how to manipulate area variables to improve the function of the classroom.

Additional FLS resources on this topic: *Managing the Preschool Classroom* and *An Introduction to Early Childhood Education*.



communicating and working with parents

*Angela Garcia,
Margaret Robinson,
Dennis Sims*

This unit is designed to give learners insight into the verbal and written communication process with parents, and to give learners practice with the process.

The ten sessions in this unit have been designed as workshops. Each provides opportunities to build upon skills learners already have and to practice new skills in workshops, family, and work settings. Each session has a central theme, and builds upon the preceding sessions.

Unit themes cover: perception and feedback in communication; communication and awareness; parent roles in the program; facilitating techniques; parent surveys.

Each session begins with sharing and reviewing individual experiences in previous activities. Opportunities are provided to explore the relationship of themes to the learner's personal interests.

Learning activities provide an opportunity to practice several important communication skills: how to respond to an emotional or critical outburst from someone else; how to encourage greater parent participation in your classroom; how to respond when you feel misinterpreted; how to recognize non-verbal messages; and how to set reasonable goals that you can effectively implement.

Other FLS materials relating to this topic: *Problem Solving with Children*; *Analyzing Children's Books from a Chicano Perspective*; *Selecting Children's Books with a Black Perspective*; *Using Toys and Games with Children*; and *Helping Children Develop Healthy Self-Concepts*.



enriching literature experiences of children

JoEllyn Taylor

This unit acquaints or reminds learners of the potential uses of children's literature and helps them develop guidelines for the selection of books, and methods for planning and facilitating children's experiences with literature. The material is written for those who work with children four to eight years of age.

A variety of short articles and learner activities explore the uses of literature, its importance, and its relationship to self-concept, personal values and personal experiences. Initial criteria for book selection and personalized literature experiences are explored within a wide range of available children's books. Learners are guided to clarification and development of their own values and criteria and their use in developing lesson plans for literature experiences.

Learner activities involve thought problems, the generation and application of criteria to books and lesson plans, role-playing, group discussions and sharing, and exploration of available literature. This unit is designed for use in a group setting and includes self-assessment activities provided throughout the unit. The entire unit is an adult model of the same techniques being taught for use with children.

Related FLS topics include: *Teaching Children to Integrate Language Experiences; Analyzing Children's Books from a Chicano Perspective; and Selecting Children's Books with a Black Perspective.*



exploring children's thinking:

part 1, classification

part 2, seriation

part 3, conservation

Keith Alward and Associates

This three-volume series introduces the learner to children's thinking and its progressive patterns of organization between three and eight years of age. This series is based on Jean Piaget's work and is written for those interested in children's thinking and the application of Piaget's theory to early childhood education.

This series covers the topics of Classification, Part 1; Seriation (order relations), Part 2; and Conservation (quantitative relations), Part 3. The preconceptual, intuitive, and concrete-operational stages of mental development are explored in each of the topic areas. The development of classification is revealed in how children use judgments about similarities and differences and the concepts of "some" and "all". Order relations (seriation) concern how children reason about sequences such as orders from least to most. Quantitative relations concern all notions of units and number and their application in such areas as measurement and arithmetic. The development of quantitative relations is examined with the use of conservation tasks which reveal children's gradual understanding that the arrangement of objects does not affect their amounts.

Learner activities consist of thought-problems, role-playing, child interviews, discussions and sharing, reading, and viewing the videotapes. Pull-out guided interview forms are provided for all interviews. The material is designed to be used with a group of learners although it should be informative to the independent learner. The series contains an introduction to Piaget and his general theory, its educational implications, and transcripts of illustrative videotapes (i.e., *The Growing Mind* set). There is also an annotated bibliography

describing most of Piaget's translated works and over 50 other publications and films.

Learners will gain skill and practice in working with children to explore their thinking. Learners will also gain a general insight into the developmental limitations as well as the richness of children's thinking and its relationship to the goals and practices of early childhood education.

Other related FLS topics: *The Growing Mind* (four videotapes); *Working with Children's Concepts*; *Using Toys and Games with Children*; and *Developing Children's Sense Perception*.



**the growing mind:
a piagetian view of children**

Keith Alward

This is a set of four, 30-minute, broadcast-quality, color videotapes covering the mental development of class, order, quantitative, and spatial relations in children between four and eight years of age. Each of the videotapes is narrated and self-contained. Three of the videotapes are complemented by corresponding FLS books in the unit titled *Exploring Children's Thinking*. The fourth videotape (spatial relations) is not accompanied by written material.

The set illustrates a variety of interviewers working in a one-to-one setting with 13 children within the preconceptual, intuitive, and concrete-operational stages of mental development. Many of the same children appear in several of the videotapes, permitting comparisons of performance in different knowledge areas. Likewise, the same child often appears in different tasks within the same knowledge area. Presentation of 12 classic Piagetian tasks are illustrated with a clear analysis of the symptoms and organization of the performance within the three stages.

The Growing Mind set is available in 1/2 inch reel-to-reel and 3/4 inch videotape cassettes. The videotapes are entitled: *The Development of Classification* (30 minutes); *The Development of Order Relations: Seriation* (28 minutes); *The Development of Quantitative Relations: Conservation* (32 minutes); and *The Development of Spatial Relations* (29 minutes).



helping children develop healthy self-concepts

Natividad DeAnda

This unit is for learners who want to develop an understanding of the effects of classroom situations on children's self-concepts. What is a healthy self-concept? How do teaching practices affect children's self-concepts? When are teacher practices demeaning, restricting, over-rating, or enhancing to children's self-concepts? These are the questions addressed in this unit.

One of the points emphasized in this unit is that children's self-concepts develop as they *take credit* for what they do and what they are as individuals, and as they *integrate* the results of new experiences into beliefs about themselves.

The first 60 pages contain guidelines and lesson plans for conducting an eight-session course or series of workshops. These are followed by three approximately 40-page readings about the nature of self-concept and its development and examples and discussions of classroom situations.

The learner progresses through the workshop series in a sequence of steps leading to a deeper understanding of the influence of adult behavior on children's self-concepts. Learner activities include identifying positive/negative classroom situations, learning and using specific criteria for detailed analysis of similar teaching situations, applying these to actually observed classes, and formulating and discussing ways to improve classroom practices. Throughout the sessions, individual ratings and analyses of teaching are shared with partners or with a group. This approach adds enrichment from the various perspectives.

Other related FLS topics: *Teaching Children to Integrate Language Experiences; Problem Solving with Children; Managing the Preschool Classroom; Communicating and Working with Parents; Analyzing Children's Books from a Chicano Perspective; Selecting Children's Books with a Black Perspective; and Enriching Literature Experiences of Children.*



an introduction to early childhood education

*Judith Johns Hubner and
Marlene Cresci*

This unit is designed to help learners clarify and develop their own educational philosophy and its implications for teaching practices in early childhood education. It explores a variety of early childhood education models and provides a framework for understanding the educational philosophy and practices of the Flexible Learning System.

The unit focuses on the analysis of four educational models representing a broad range of practices in contemporary programs: The Responsive Model; The Open Education Model; The Behavior Analysis Model; and the Engelmann-Becker Model. An earlier Laboratory product, the Early Childhood Information Unit, is an audio-visual print package which provides an overview of the four models. It is an integral part of this unit.

Learner activities include: reading, group discussions, presentations, viewing filmstrips, observing programs, and developing and participating in learner-designed activities. Unit activities are integrated to accomplish: knowledge of model programs in early childhood education; clarification of personal values/goals/priorities in working with children; articulation of a personal model of early childhood education.



managing the preschool classroom

Judy Brown

This unit provides training on how to use classroom planning to avoid management problems and the use of techniques to reduce inappropriate behavior in the classroom.

Management is approached as the process of organizing and structuring the classroom, its activities, and the responsibilities of staff and children. Management is directed towards helping children assume responsibility for their own behavior in a climate that maximizes individual freedom and minimizes disturbances in the learning environment.

Criteria for classroom management, establishing rules and limits, scheduling, and the provisioning and use of materials are explored in the context of minimizing the occurrence of management problems. Learners are given practice in developing rules and limits, arranging classroom activities, developing daily plans, demonstrating the arrangement of materials, and extending and adapting classroom materials to meet individual needs.

Learners are also helped to know how to handle inappropriate behavior when it occurs. Topics covered include: determining the problem; anticipating and re-directing inappropriate behavior; attending to positive behavior; contingent use of classroom activities; using time out; why punishment is an inappropriate form of classroom management.

The unit is written to be used with a group of fellow learners and a trainer, or individually. Many of the activities assume that learners are working in or have easy access to preschool classrooms. Learner activities involve classroom observation, demonstration, working with children, thought and problem-solving activities.

Other FLS units related to this topic: *Helping Children Develop Healthy Self-Concepts; Arranging the Classroom for Children; Problem Solving with Children; An Introduction to Early Childhood Education; and Understanding Children's Play Through Observation.*



problem solving with children

Joanne Yinger

This book was written for persons interested in helping children develop problem-solving skills and attitudes. The focus is on offering adults an opportunity to develop skills in helping children assume more and more responsibility for their own problem solving and their own learning. Persons interested in increasing their own problem-solving skills or helping children and adults become better problem solvers should find this book informative. While it was designed to be used with a group of learners, it is capable of independent use.

Problems are treated as opportunities to learn in which individuals or groups want something changed, are personally affected, and in a position to assume responsibility for solving the problem. Problems in the cognitive, social and personal domains are considered. Skills in problem identification and clarification, idea generation, implementation of solutions, and evaluation of results are explored.

Over half of the book is devoted to teaching techniques for guiding children in problem-solving activity. Techniques are grouped under: "tuning in", "drawing out", guiding and supporting the creation of possible solutions. Skills involve: listening; paraphrasing; questioning; creating analogies and imagery; connecting "far-out" ideas to the reality of the problem to be solved.

Recall of personal problem-solving experiences, observations of children, classroom practice, and roleplay are embedded in 26 learner activities. Rich examples of a wide range of classroom problems are interspersed among learner activities.

Related FLS topics: *Helping Children Develop Healthy Self-Concepts; Understanding Children's Play Through Observation; Managing the Preschool Classroom; Communicating and Working with Parents; and Working with Children's Concepts.*

Jack, New York, Collier Books, 1969; *Song of the Empty Bottles*, Molansky, Osmond.

Other FLS units related to this topic: *Analyzing Children's Books from a Chicano Perspective*; *Helping Children Develop Healthy Self-Concepts*; *Enriching Literature Experiences of Children*; and *Communicating and Working with Parents*.



**teaching children
to integrate
language experiences**

Margot Biesman

This unit introduces the concept of teaching language arts in relationship to the development of a child's healthy self-concept. It is a practical book. It provides a teaching process with techniques for helping children to find meaning and to assimilate or integrate their personal experience in language arts activities. Since the focus of the unit is on the process of teaching and learning, what is taken from the unit may be applied to learning activities other than language arts but also others. The unit provides a unique view into the dynamics of creative production and its representation.

It is divided into four sections which may be taught separately or used in sequence. The sections include opportunities for a child to assimilate or integrate his/her own experiences in listening, fantasy, memory of familiar past experiences, and spontaneous classroom activities with expressions in art, movement-dance, and written and oral language. Children are given the opportunity to gain pre-reading and reading skills from these experiences. Each section provides the learner with a guided sequence of activities which includes: presentation of criteria for an integrated language experience; sharing, reviewing and evaluating their experience; planning activities for children based on their experience; implementing their plans; evaluating their implementation and children's responses. The learner has an opportunity to move from using plans as designed in the unit with modifications to extending and further adapting plans for follow-up activities for children, and then using elements from the teaching process in designing plans for their own activities. Many rich examples of plans adapted by learners are provided throughout the text and in the separate learner's resource booklet. Handy forms provide methods for learners and instructors to evaluate activities. Beginning and advanced levels of performance are suggested for all activities and are

designed for children from preschool to third grade

Other FLS units related to this topic: *Developing Children's Sense Perception; Helping Children Develop Healthy Self-Concepts; Working with Children's Concepts; and Enriching Literature Experiences of Children.*



understanding children's play through observation

Judy Brown

This is a unit on "how to observe children's play" and on the classroom conditions that promote productive play activity. The unit focuses on developing skills in observing and analyzing children's play and relating them to appropriate adult roles.

The unit activities and an accompanying film are organized to help learners develop specific play intervention strategies such as when to ask children questions, provide information, and redirect play. Observation forms are provided.

The unit is designed to be used with a group of fellow learners. Active small group discussion is an important aspect of the learning process for this unit. Completion of this unit should enable learners to: discuss why play is important for a child's growth and development; write objective descriptions of a child's play activity; determine when to provide additional resources for increasing children's learning through play; determine when to intervene, extend, or adapt the play situation to promote children's learning; create a classroom environment to achieve a set of objectives; determine when to participate as a co-player and when to redirect the play situation.

The unit is accompanied by a 28-minute, 16-mm, color-sound film entitled *Observing Children's Play*. This film is a non-narrated sequence of children engaging in social play. The majority of unit activities require making observations from the film.

Additional FLS resources on this topic: *Working with Children's Concepts*; *Managing the Preschool Classroom*; and *Problem Solving with Children*.



using toys and games with children

*Nimnicht, Brown, Johnson, Addison,
Rosenau, Adcock, and Houdyshell*

This book was written for learners who want to become more skilled in using toys and games to help children (between three and eight years of age) learn some basic skills and concepts. It is a practical, systematic, prescribed introduction to working with children for those who are new to teaching and for paraprofessional and volunteer staff.

A total of 18 toys and 82 games provide a range of experiences in: classifying, ordering, spatial reasoning, patterning, thinking inductively and deductively, problem-solving, memorizing, decoding and encoding language, sensing and numerating. Ordered sequences of learning episodes (games) provide specific learning experiences with each of the toys.

A basic set of eight toys is accompanied by an introductory film plus a film strip and an audio cassette for each toy. Other games are illustrated in cartoon strips. All games are described in short and easily read steps.

Activities involve working with children, viewing audio-visual materials, making classroom observations, extending and modifying existing games.

Learners acquire skills in modeling precise language, contributing to the development of healthy self-concepts, creating conditions for spontaneous learning, helping children develop problem-solving skills, and working with children responsively.

Additional FLS materials related to this topic: *Developing Children's Sense Perception*; *Helping Children Develop Health Self-Concepts*; *Working with Children's Concepts*; *Exploring Children's Thinking* (three volumes); and *The Growing Mind* (four videotapes).



working with children's concepts

Keith Alward

This unit is about concepts and their character in the early childhood years. It concerns children between two and eight years of age. This is not a how-to-do-it book. It focuses mainly on helping adults understand the nature, organization, and development of concepts and the relationship of these to represented and shared interests. Anyone interested in concepts should find this book informative.

Conceptual learning is placed in the broad framework of shared interests and shared forms of representation. Concepts are viewed as representable, shareable, and as organized knowledge formulated around interests. They are also viewed as susceptible to agreement and disagreement, and, in some cases, capable of being forgotten.

The suggestion is made that efforts to teach concepts should consider the match of the interests, representations, and conceptual organization of the education community to those of the child.

Familiarity with the contents of the series, *Exploring Children's Thinking*, provides an important foundation for understanding this book. An understanding of the mental development of classification skills should be considered a prerequisite. Both the organization and development of concepts are strongly related to the child's understanding of class and order relations.

Learner activities involve analyzing adult concepts and their representation, adult classification activities, interviews of children, classroom observation, and thought problems. Written material provides an introduction and follow-up to each activity. The appendix contains notes on clinical interviewing and a bibliography of over 60 publications and films. Activities are integrated to help students learn: ten characteristics of concepts; how concepts are organized; how the organization of concepts change with mental development;

how concepts are represented; how interests determine the formation of concepts; guidelines for educational practice that support conceptual growth.

Other FLS materials related to this topic: *Exploring Children's Thinking*; *The Growing Mind*; *Developing Children's Sense Perception*; *Using Toys and Games with Children*; *Understanding Children's Play Through Observation*; *Problem Solving with Children*; and *Teaching Children to Integrate Language Experiences*.



THE FAR WEST LABORATORY FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT's goal is to contribute to the improvement of educational practices. Through educational development and service activities, a staff of 220 works to help children and adults have more and better opportunities to learn.

Educational development is a new discipline. It involves, first, focusing on an important but specific area in need of improvement and then inventing, field testing, and providing a generally useful solution to that problem or need. The solution may be a new self-contained product or an alternative process or system to be used by educators, by students, by parents, or by all of them together.

All Laboratory products undergo a rigorous research and development cycle prior to release for reproduction and distribution by other agencies. At least three phases of field testing—work with a prototype, a supervised performance field test, and an operational test under normal user conditions without Laboratory participation—precede formal external review and an official decision on acceptability. In view of this thorough evaluation, those who adopt Laboratory products and processes can know with certainty the kind of outcomes they can anticipate in their own educational setting. Laboratory products have consistently earned high rankings in impartial national evaluations of research-and-development based training materials.

The Laboratory is uniquely qualified to train adults in the use of media and in other educational/technological areas. The professional staff has developed extensive experience in preparing multi-media training materials for professionals and in providing on-site training. A fully equipped multi-media studio in the new Center for Educational Development includes a broad array of film, videotape, photography, and other modern communication facilities.

The Laboratory is a public non-profit organization located in the San Francisco Bay Area and supported in part by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

The work of the Laboratory is governed by a Board of Directors appointed by the major educational agencies in the states of California, Nevada, and Utah.



COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING UNITS FOR ADULTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION THE FLEXIBLE LE

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FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
1855 FOLSOM STREET SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103

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